

Green Mountain Common Allotment

The Mission for the GMCA is:

Manage the public lands in the Green Mountain Common Allotment in a manner that will promote stewardship of the land while providing for sustained multiple use.

- BLM, working with ranchers and interested publics, has endeavored to improve livestock grazing management to meet rangeland health standards.
- The history of range improvement efforts in the area demonstrates concern from a variety of interested publics. The area represents a resource rich in diversity both of landscape and habitat.
- In 1999, BLM made a decision that included management actions for improving the Green Mountain Common Allotment. For a number of reasons, the actions are not resulting in significant progress towards meeting rangeland health standards.
- Despite intensive efforts to improve rangeland health, important rangeland health standards are not being met in critical areas such as riparian health. A 2002 comprehensive evaluation report and monitoring data show that significant improvement is not occurring.
- Stakeholders share a common goal of protecting the resources in the Green Mountain Common Allotment.
- BLM is committed to finding solutions to the rangeland health issues, in cooperation with our numerous stakeholders.
- BLM's priority is to manage this area for multiple use, with sustainable productivity for all stakeholders.



Background:

- Sheep use was converted to cattle use in the 1950's.
- A “Notice of Appeal” was filed by the National Wildlife Federation (lead Appellant), Western Watersheds Project, Wyoming Wildlife Federation, and the Wyoming Outdoor Council on the GMCA 2005 Operating Plan. The Appellants claimed the BLM had failed to implement existing grazing requirements. The appeal has been dismissed because the 2005 Operating Plan was not a new decision.
- Management of the GMCA is being guided by the August 31, 1999 Final Decision. An Allotment Evaluation of the GMCA was completed on December 16, 2002. A conformance review for Standards for Healthy Rangelands which was part of the Allotment Evaluation, documented that we were not meeting nor making significant progress toward meeting standards for riparian health or habitats for native species.
- The BLM, in cooperation with the GMCA permittees and interested publics have held numerous field reviews and training sessions to educate and improve on-the-ground management of the GMCA. The National Riparian Service Team has held several training sessions in Lander. A “low-stress livestock herding” session was also offered to permittees of the GMCA.
- As a result of the allotment evaluation, the BLM began developing alternatives for an environmental assessment (EA) for the GMCA. The alternative that is eventually selected will be used to develop an Allotment Management Plan (AMP) for the GMCA. The AMP will implement needed changes that will bring riparian health and habitats for native species into conformance with the healthy rangeland standards.
- 81% of the available forage is permitted for livestock; 13% for big game species of wildlife; and 6% for wild horses.
- The GMCA contains critical habitats for sage-grouse, prong-horn antelope, mule deer, elk and wild horses. The GMCA is rich in diversity, both in terms of landscape and habitat.
- The GMCA consists of 527, 969 total acres. Approximately 89% of the total acres are BLM-administered public lands; 7% are Wyoming State lands; and 4% are privately held lands.
- The GMCA is recognized as one of the largest unfenced, open-spaced grazing allotments in the BLM.



- The lands within the GMCA have been experiencing severe drought most years since 1999. As a result, the BLM, in cooperation and consultation with the allotment's permittees and interested publics have temporarily reduced the authorized livestock on the allotment. During this period, the actual use percentage ranged from 66% in 2000 to 13% in 2003.
- Even though consensus has been difficult to reach, the stakeholders share a common goal of the need to maintain and improve the unique qualities of the GMCA.
- The BLM continues to work on developing the alternatives to be analyzed in the EA. The BLM will release the draft alternatives for public comment in November 2005, and allow for a 45-day comment period will take place.

Improvements made to date by stakeholders and BLM: (with associated costs)

Between 1998 and 2004, a total of \$527,000 has been spent on 46 range improvement projects such as wells with storage tanks; springs; water pipelines; and riparian fences. Of the \$527,000, BLM contributed 72 % of the funds (\$378,529), permittees 9% (\$46,329) and other partners added 19% (\$102,295) to the total range improvement investment.





GMCA 2002 Evaluation Report Findings

Riparian health: The goal in riparian areas is to improve their health by establishing and maintaining willow and native sedge communities, restoring or maintaining shallow groundwater tables, and maintaining and preserving permanent spring sources.

Riparian health is both the highest priority goal and the biggest range health problem in the Green Mountain Common Allotment, according to the evaluation BLM performed on the area in 2002.

The report concluded that, in each monitoring area, “vigor of young and mature willows remained poor throughout the five years as observed in photos and field inspections” in each of the areas monitored. Restoring and maintaining sedge communities, the second objective of riparian health, was also an objective that was not achieved. High amounts of upland species in riparian areas indicates the riparian areas are drying.

For the third objective, restoring or maintaining shallow groundwater tables, though direct monitoring of shallow groundwater tables had not been conducted, the wetland obligate vegetation—which would occur with shallow groundwater table restoration—was not observed.

Objective four is to maintain and preserve permanent spring sources. This objective is not being met due to inadequate rest and recovery time. According to the report, “the deferred rotation combined with the lack of effective livestock control is resulting in heavy and severe use levels in riparian areas.

Wildlife: The Green Mountain Common Allotment boasts a rich diversity of wildlife and includes two pronghorn antelope herd areas, two mule deer herd units, three elk herd units, and one moose herd.

According to the 2002 Evaluation Report, “big game population levels have generally remained stable during this evaluation period, with some noted exceptions.” Antelope numbers in the Beaver Rim herd unit are below the objective number, while antelope numbers in the Red Desert herd have been slightly increasing. Mule deer herds in the allotment are below objective as a result of hot, dry weather, low vegetative production, and heavy livestock use resulting in poor habitat conditions.

Elk herds continue to be above the objective, so hunting seasons are aimed at reducing populations. Very few moose are known to occur in the Green Mountain Common Allotment, and populations have remained near or just above objective for the Lander moose herd.

Wild Horses: Appropriate management levels (AMLs) were met for various herd areas within the Green Mountain Common Allotment between 1997 and 2001.

According to the 2002 Evaluation Report, “an analysis by herd area shows that significant removal efforts have kept horse numbers at AML the entire time in the Green Mountain Herd Management Area, in three of five years in the Crooks Mountain Herd Management Area, and in two of four years in the Antelope Hills/Cyclone Rim Herd Management Area. All herd areas are now at AML.

Open space: One of the unique features and a valuable resource of this area is the naturalness of the landscape. This large tract of land has remained in public ownership and is substantially undeveloped. This undeveloped character, combined with free-roaming wildlife and wild horse populations, recreational activities such as hunting, back country hiking, and exploring historic trails, creates opportunities that are increasingly rare throughout the west. BLM has been mostly successful in developing projects beneficial to livestock operators and livestock without significantly impacting open space and the natural character of the allotment. A number of individuals who represent recreation and wildlife interests disagree with this conclusion. They contend that fences such as the ones creating the Sweetwater Canyon and Ice Slough riparian pastures have adversely impacted the open space character of the Green Mountain Common Allotment. Further subdivision of the allotment into separate pastures and fencing additional riparian areas will endanger the character of the area.

From the viewpoint of the recreational user, there is considerable concern that livestock grazing will become the dominant use and may displace certain attributes of the area. While not optimum from a ranching perspective, maintaining the status quo—few additional fences and water developments—allows the area to continue to be managed as a large tract of wild country.



Alternatives for Management of the Green Mountain Common Allotment to be analyzed in the Environmental Assessment

Alternative 1: Alternative 1 represents the “no action” alternative which would result in a continuation of the present management plan as proposed in Environmental Assessment No. WY050-EA9-039 and adopted by a decision of the Lander Field Office Manager on July 12, 1999.

Alternative 2: Under this alternative, the Green Mountain Common Allotment would be broken up into six smaller, individual grazing allotments. In order to accomplish this, approximately 160 miles of new fence would be constructed. A comprehensive water plan would be developed for range management on the allotment, including the Alkali and Crooks Creek drainages. A new 35-mile water pipeline with numerous “spur” lines would be constructed to provide water to the new allotments located in the southern portion of the existing GMCA. The grazing season would remain the same, and so would the permitted livestock numbers and AUMs. Other major components of this alternative include a cooperative monitoring plan and improved flexibility to the GMCA grazing permittees. This alternative was formulated using input from the permittees in the Green Mountain Common Allotment and from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture.

Alternative 3: Under this alternative, the BLM would conduct an intensive suitability and capability study to determine the appropriate carrying capacity for livestock on the GMCA. The BLM would identify key areas to monitor and would develop stubble height, willow and stream bank trampling indicators. Stubble height and stream bank alteration indicators would be enforced to protect riparian habitat. Livestock would be removed from the pasture (or the allotment if in the last pasture of the rotation sequence) once the threshold (or “triggers”) are met.

Alternative 4: Under this alternative, the Green Mountain Common Allotment would be divided into two separate grazing allotments. The existing Green Mountain Use Area and the Hadsell Pasture would be separated from the current GMCA and made into a new allotment. The Alkali Creek Sheep Use Area would remain as a use area within the main allotment, but would be for sheep use only. The remaining area, which represents the majority of acreage, would remain one large grazing allotment. New allotment names would be given to each of the two allotments based on dominant geographic features within their respective boundaries.

